

Thursday, February 15, 2007

Good morning, I'm Cynthia Dierks, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Park Ranger with the Milford Lake Update.

Many of you may be wondering how close we are to setting a new record low, lake elevation for Milford Lake. Actually we've been holding steady for awhile. On December 29, 2006 we came within .8 of a foot to a new low! That may sound fairly close but with a 15,709 surface acre lake, that's still a lot of water! Looking at the actual records, navigational releases only dropped us in late summer 2 feet below normal. Additional releases were made for water quality and water supply due to lack of regional rainfall. That's what brought us down to our current roughly 6 ½ feet below normal elevation. Also remember that under normal conditions, we usually draw down 2-3 feet for the winter.

Believe it or not...our 2007 Annual Day Use Passes are finally in. They are still \$30/per pass and cover boat launch and beach fees nationwide at any Corps lake. The passes are good for a year from month of purchase. Check your pass from last year as it may be valid for several more months. Here at Milford Lake we don't start charging boat ramp fees until April 1st.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, SAFE ICE is an oxymoron. Ice is never 100% safe! Before you decide to go ice fishing or walk across that frozen cove at one of our multipurpose lakes such as Milford, please consider this. Underneath that ice we may have drawn the lake down; there may be quite an air pocket between the ice and the water level. There are lots of currents created in a lake; fish may be moving around in groups. The ice may be old, from earlier in the winter season and not new, clear, fresh ice. All of these circumstances may affect the "safety value" of current ice conditions. So when you hear that it's "safe" to walk out on 4 inches of new, clear ice to go ice fishing...think carefully before you go. Drill test holes as you go further out to make sure the ice is still thick enough. Here in Kansas it's not a good idea to drive a vehicle out onto the ice. Check with local authorities governing the body of water you want to use. It may be a violation to "drive out on the ice" under any conditions.

You should be prepared in case you fall through the ice. Always notify someone as to exactly where you are going and when you will return. It makes it a lot easier to come looking for you rather than waiting for the spring thaw. Dress warmly; think about purchasing a float coat or jacket. They not only help to keep you warm but provide buoyancy if you should go in the water. Carry two large nails and use them as ice picks to pull yourself up onto the ice if you should fall through. Kick with your feet and roll away from the break after you pull yourself out. Return across the ice the way you originally came before falling through. Change into warm, dry clothing as soon as you can and seek medical treatment if necessary.

Please remember.....with lake temperatures hovering around 32 degrees, your safety around cold water is our concern. That's the Milford Lake Update.